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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the kinds of conceptual metaphors one composition instructor has used in commenting on student papers, notes whether or not they are commonly used by most writing instructors, and briefly states why metaphors can be effective feedback for students. The paper lists the 6 categories of metaphors as: (1) adherence, (2) building, (3) tailoring, (4) hunting, (5) personification, and (6) original analogies. The paper explains the Schema Theory and Mapping of Domains, using the metaphor "life is a journey." It also discusses and gives examples of each of the six categories. One example used in the paper shows that under the target domain of "adherence," such words as "stick," "connect," and "link," are included which become conceptual metaphors when they are associated with words in the domain of "discourse," such as "focus," "modes," and "sentence." The paper states that, of the categories, personification is more selective and seems more likely to reflect an instructor's world view. (CR)

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METAPHORS IN COMMENTS AND CLASSROOMS

(Paper presented at the 1997 4Cs Convention (Phoenix)

by Joan Karbach, Ph.D.

In *More Than Cool Reason*, George Lakoff and Mark Turner show that metaphor concerns the way we think and is an indispensable tool for understanding ourselves and our world. Using their work as a guide, I will identify the kinds of conceptual metaphors one composition instructor has used in commenting on student papers, note whether or not they are commonly used by most writing instructors, and briefly state why metaphors can be effective feedback for students.

I am indebted to Dr. Elizabeth Hoger, who as a graduate instructor at Purdue University, provided me with the end comments she had typed on student papers. The papers came from two classes of ENGL101 Freshman Composition and covered three different assignments. In total, 100 commentaries were scanned for metaphoric content. Most of the comments are phrases taken out of context, and except for losing some of Dr. Hoger's empathetic tone, the phrases proved sufficient for classifying metaphors.

The six categories to be discussed chiefly consist of those used most frequently:

1. Adherence
2. Building
3. Tailoring
4. Hunting
5. Personification
6. Original analogies

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Before discussing these categories, it is necessary to explain the Schema Theory and Mapping of Domains as presented by Lakoff and Turner (Figure 1).

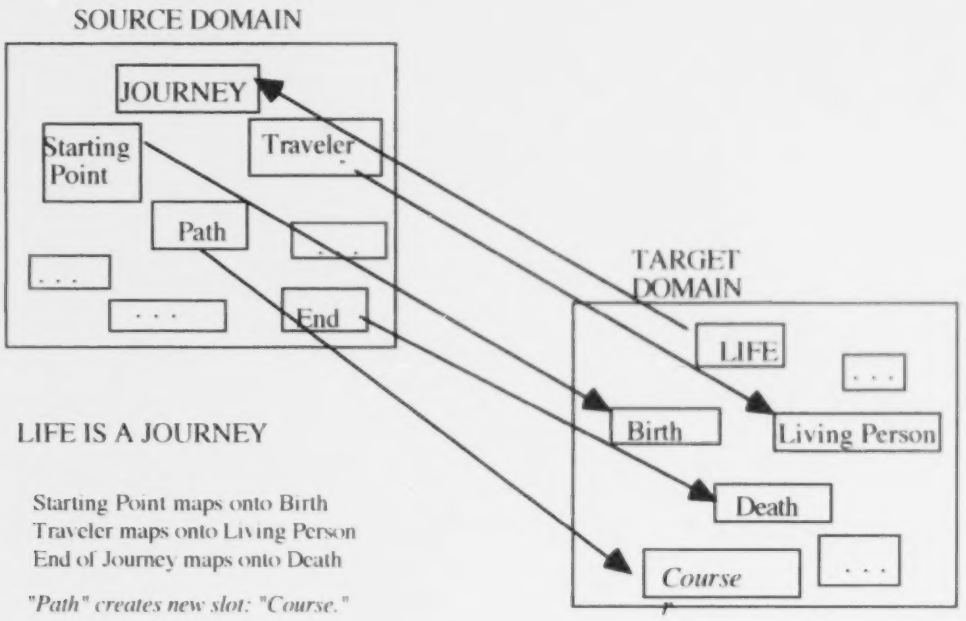

Figure 1. Schema Theory and Mapping of Domains.
from *More Than Cool Reason* by George Lakoff and Mark Turner

As shown above, in the metaphor, Life is a Journey, the words associated with the source domain, Journey, become conceptual metaphors when mapped onto words in the target domain, Life. For instance, a journey's Starting Point, mapped onto a comparable slot in the target domain, is Birth; Traveler, mapped onto a comparable slot, is Living Person; and the End of Journey, mapped onto a comparable slot, is Death. When a word in the source domain has no comparable word in the target domain, a new slot is created, such as Path in the source domain creating the new slot, Course.

The first category to be discussed concerns the target domain of Adherence, which included words, such as "stick," "connect," "link," "fuse," "glue," "tie," "hook," and "tack." These words became conceptual metaphors when they were associated with words in the domain of Discourse, such as "focus," "modes," "sentence," "narrative," and "paragraph." And how many of us have told students: "stick to your focus," "you have fused the modes," or "tack on a final sentence" ? Maybe not all of us, but many, I'm sure.

Under the target domain of Building (which contained the highest usage) words most often used were "build," "support," and "develop." Phrases such as "build a stronger introduction," support your focus," and "develop that point," are familiar to most of us.

Under the third group, the target domain of Tailoring, most entries concerned the word itself--"tailoring," and a few phrases used the words, "thread" and "pin down." Examples of the latter phrases include "identify the connecting thread in each paragraph," and "your organization scheme is a little hard to pin down."

The fourth group contains words associated with the target domain of Hunting: "pursue," "snare," and "prey," and when linked to the words associated with the source domain of Discourse, such as "audience," "focus," and "assumptions," they yield "snare your audience," "pursue that focus," and "you have fallen prey to assuming."

The fifth category of Personification contained many entries that concerned the Discourse word of "focus." A couple words or ideas from the domain of People associated with focus were "promise," the idea of being lost, and the word, "fat." For instance, "your focus is promising something," "your focus has been found," and "you have a fat focus."

Of the categories discussed so far, Personification is more selective and seems more likely to reflect an instructor's world view. For instance, Beth uses the word "fat" frequently in referring to parts of discourse, not only about a "fat focus," but also about "fat sentences" and "fat paragraphs." Yet as a writing instructor, I have never used the word "fat" to refer to the focus, sentence, or paragraph. Actually this has more to do with my own taboo of certain words

than Beth's world view. However the personalization we give to various parts of discourse may be considered individual, and although systematized, less of a general metaphorical concept.

The last category to be mentioned concerns analogies. This category is even more highly individual than Personification. For example, most of us are not so likely to make the following comments:

"You will hatch a focus."

"Too many options send you into overdrive."

And my favorite:

"This subject will launch you in philisophical circles and unfocused prose."

In conclusion, of the six categories examined, the first four seem to be the most conventional--used by many of us in discussing student writing: Adherence, Building, Tailoring, and Hunting. The last two, Personification and Analogy, cannot be grouped according to any one domain, and therefore are the most highly individualized metaphors, likely reflecting each instructor's frame of reference or world view.

According to Chaim Perelman:

> Today whether it is a question of metaphors living or dead, awakened or dormant, the certainty prevails that philosophic thought, and perhaps all creative thought, cannot do without them (24).

As we have seen in the commentaries of one writing instructor, metaphors are not only indispensable in the use of ordinary discourse, but also in metadiscourse. Conceptual metaphors help us as writing instructors to give feedback--translating abstract rhetorical principles into concrete metaphorical concepts so that students more readily comprehend our comments.

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